



ENJOY A WEEKEND - AND A FEW HANDS OF QUEEN NAZARENE - AT HARTMAN CASTLE

Unique Logan Martin Lake property is an Airbnb superhost

Written by **LOYD MCINTOSH**

Photography provided by **BLAKE SHULTZ**

If you didn't see it with your own eyes, you probably wouldn't believe it.

After snaking your way through the narrow roads of Alpine Bay, you'll eventually encounter it, like some sort of mid-70s Sid and Marty Krofft meets Monty Python fever dream: a castle.

That's right. A castle.

Hartman Castle, to be precise – an endearingly bizarre amalgam of Bavarian, English, and even Asian architecture all rolled into one and tucked away among the modern homes in this otherwise normal waterfront neighborhood.

The castle was built by Donald Hartman, a native of Toledo, Ohio, who settled in Talladega County after serving as an Army communications specialist while stationed in Hawaii and Birmingham. Well-educated with multiple degrees, Hartman was a beloved Spanish teacher at Berry High School for many years and was respected as a leader in foreign language education. He began working on the castle in the mid-1970s as a gift to his wife, Royldene, who always wanted to live in a castle.

After Royldene died in the early 2000s, Hartman lost interest in the project, living semi-reclusively in a house next door to the castle, which fell into disrepair. After Hartman died in 2022, the house was put

up for auction online, catching the eye of Blake Shultz, a Realtor and home builder from Hoover.

By the time Shultz saw the property, it had sat abandoned for almost two decades, and the vegetation was so overgrown it was almost impossible to see the house from the road. Additionally, most of the bidders hadn't seen the property, and the auction company's listing promoted the castle for the property instead of the structure. Shultz, on the other hand, thought Hartman Castle was a diamond in the rough.

"It was interesting," he said. "The way they worded it, basically it was posed as a teardown. I don't think any other serious bidders got to see the inside, so everyone





else that we were bidding against online, all the knowledge they had was it was a teardown.

“They just saw the value in the land, which has a pretty hard cap on what it could be worth as just raw land. So we got to take advantage of the auctioneer

advertising it, in my opinion, incorrectly, which gave us a pretty big advantage.”

Shultz bought Hartman Castle and eventually converted it into a unique Airbnb experience, transporting visitors back in time. But at the time Shultz took ownership of the castle, it appeared to be

frozen in time.

“It looked like 20 years ago someone just walked out without touching anything and locked the doors,” he said. “The fridge had food in it, there were magazines next to the couches and the bed, some of which were made and some were like someone





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just got out of it a few minutes ago. It was a little eerie.”

Today, Harman Castle has been restored to its former glory and updated with new features. The German-style castle finials (painted in eye-popping blue and gold), the handcrafted stone wall surrounding much of the property, and a mechanically operated drawbridge at the castle’s front entrance add a healthy dose of medieval-inspired whimsy to the Logan Martin community.

Guests are greeted by a life-size suit of armor the moment they step inside the castle. Throughout the rest of the multi-level structure, the eyes are drawn to artwork, decorative touches, and knickknacks the Hartmans accumulated over the years on their many travels overseas. Around the castle, guests will find German beer steins, vases from Asia, and coats of arms from England – a testament to the Hartmans’ eclectic taste and keen interest in other cultures. “They traveled the world together and took



influences from all over the globe, so there are a lot of conflicting styles,” Shultz says.

Among the enhancements Shultz made to Hartman Castle include adding pickleball courts and a miniature golf

course and converting a space on the bottom floor into a game room. There guests can play a vintage pinball machine or video game or lift a pint around the card table during a game of Queen

Nazarene (an Old English card game dating to the 1670s).

Less than two years since opening Hartman Castle to the public, Shultz says the interest and response has been amazing. People from more than 20 states have stayed at the castle, and their reviews have been overwhelmingly favorable.

"Everyone's loved it," Schultz said. "We've gotten all five-star reviews, and, amazingly, we've gotten into the superhost status on Airbnb. Everything's been super positive."



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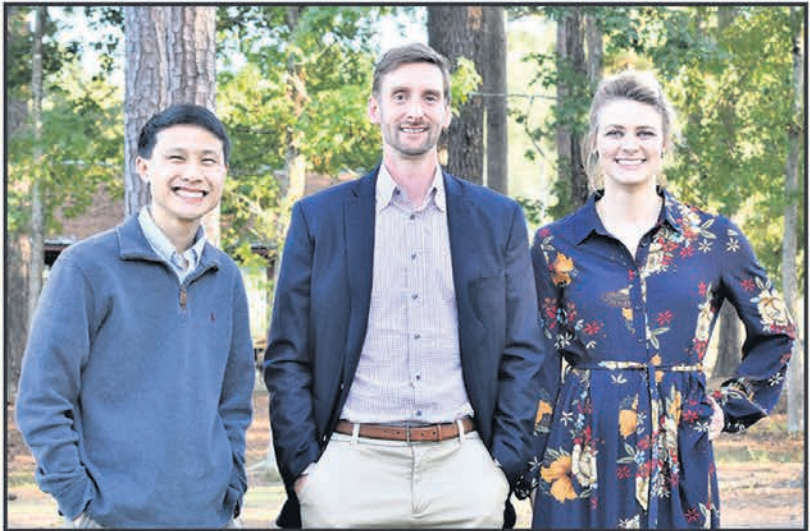
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